

Chapter IX

Into the Present

The work of the Brothers was much appreciated by the parish, and these young men, studying for priesthood, were warmly welcomed.

Their availability, sadly, was limited, and parishioners ultimately took over the task of religious instruction of the children. While many members of the congregation have given long hours of labor to this important duty, perhaps none have made more contribution than Mrs. Theo. Gregory. "Jo" was the tenacious, moving spirit whose efforts have meant so much to the program.

In 1972, Father Edward Connelly succeeded to the pastorship. Father Connelly was a man of easy, affable manner, who at once captured the affection, not only of the congregation, but of the entire community. Not, perhaps, since Father Navarron, had the "priest of the valley" found such great popularity with the community at large. "Father Ed" was a person of slight stature, with a ready, warm and disarming smile, and good-natured Irish charm. He was said to have "a heart as big as he was small." And time and again he proved that, comforting the sick, consoling the bereaved, and sharing his wisdom and guidance. His firm, but ever gentle, tutelage made the changes of Vatican II at last seem familiar and comfortable to the parishioners, who affectionately referred to him as "our Leprechaun."

Father Connelly had come from St. Paul's in Over-the-Rhine Cincinnati, and had been Assistant Director of Catholic Charities for the Archdiocese. Out of such experiences he combined wit and charm with a no-nonsense, real-world view of things. Interviewed by Marta Waldorf for the *Clermont Courier*, as pastor of the County's first parish, in connection with the U.S. Bicentennial, he said of St. Philomena that it was "Just like any of your bigger or newer churches in this area....Of course, the parish is just a little more spread out, but they don't miss anything up there."

In 1981, Father Connelly was reassigned as pastor of St. Margaret Mary Church in North College Hill. In June of 1984, he retired as pastor emeritus, due to a serious illness. He died on September 25 of that year.

His memory is honored by Connelly Hall at Holy Trinity Church, and by countless fond recollections of the faithful he served.

The demands of growing parishes placed heavy burdens on the dual pastorship of Holy Trinity/St. Philomena. Visiting priests have played a major role in the recent history of both parishes. Without their help, services available to both congregations would have been greatly reduced.

The Verona Fathers, an Italian missionary order, provided valuable assistance to the pastors of St. Philomena and Holy Trinity. Father Charles, Father Rico and especially Father Simoni, alternated with the pastor at Sunday Mass, and other occasions, during these times. Father Simoni was a colorful personality, and by far, the most frequent visitor.

Father Simoni had come to Sacred Heart Seminary in 1964 as a Latin teacher. The bulk of his life had been spent in the missions in Africa, where he had served in the Sudanese jungles for 30 years. His noticeable limp was the result of an attack by a leopard which had jumped through a window into his classroom in 1936. The priest had thrown himself into the path of the big cat in order to protect his students.